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ABSTRACT

Teaching the Vietnam War in high school history courses is a challenge to the instructor, and study that relies only on textbooks may neglect the controversy surrounding the War and the issues that faced the nation. This paper discusses how to use songs about the Vietnam War as an instructional tool to investigate the role of songs during the War and to serve as a stimulus to study the controversies surrounding the War. Students are challenged to investigate the various perspectives presented in these songs and to examine devices utilized within lyrics to support the views they present. Titles and categories of songs that either censured the inhumanity of wars in general and the Vietnam War specifically, or portrayed support for the War in Indochina are included. (NL)

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Musical Images of the Vietnam War

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INTRODUCTION

It has been well-documented over the years that the traditional textbook approach to teaching the Vietnam War in high school history courses is at best inadequate, and at worst detrimental to the development of thinking citizens in a democratic society.[1] In an effort to cram one more significant episode of American history into the chronological march through time, secondary textbooks offer a "sketchy account" of the war in Vietnam. A unit of study that only relies on the textbook tends to neglect the controversy that surrounded the war and the issues that faced the nation. Many teachers understand that greater coverage is needed, but an already overcrowded curriculum and lack of effective supplemental materials serve as roadblocks to serious, comprehensive study of the war.[2] During this session, we hope to provide social studies teachers with a supplemental activity that will help to vary the way material about the Vietnam War is presented, while at the same time providing a strategy that will hopefully make this time period more alive and real for students who were only infants at the end of the war.

This article is about how to use songs about the Vietnam War as an instructional tool to investigate the popular role of songs during war and to serve as a springboard to study the controversial nature of the war. Students should be challenged to investigate the slanted perspectives presented in several songs and themes, with particular attention directed toward examining specific propaganda devices utilized within lyrics.

IMPACT OF POPULAR MUSIC

Popular music can be an effective means to examine the various historical and contemporary experiences of American social and cultural life. Popular music emphasizes a variety of human existence that affects men and women's living and behavior such as their goals, aspirations, tribulations, outlooks, motives, and traditions involving their political, economic, social, regional, ethnic, religious, aesthetic, and intellectual lives. As one author explains:

> Music, when viewed over time, has mirrored changes in much the same way that the popular press, films, and television have. Its advantage over the others is that it has responded more quickly, at a lower cost, and has probably reached more of the young people who are less likely to be in the forefront of change. By exploring fads, teenage concerns, social issues, and ever other imaginable topic, PM [popular music] fills in much of the background that traditional historians ignore. Pop songs can serve as a catalyst to understanding the evolution of our culture. There is a fascinating history in those grooves.[3]

SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION IN MUSIC

It is interesting to note how contemporary popular music views social studies education. A number of songs have criticized social studies as:

- the acquisition of boring, meaningless information with class time spent by students either wasting away the occasion or trying to make some grade just to get by;[4]

- the perpetuation of blind obedience to irrational beliefs and hypocritical community or national norms to the exclusion of personal and global interests;[5]

- the inability to provide useful skills for present or future life experiences;[6]

- the modeling of inconsistent and confusing heroes "who are always right and never wrong";[7]

- the irrelevancy toward students' needs, disrespect for students' ideas and inner feelings, and fostering of mental passivity by turning students into "mindless vegetables".[8]

Indeed, Sam Cooke concludes in his song, "(What a) Wonderful World," that after completion of his social studies class, he did not learn much of anything. He reveals, "Don't know nothin' 'bout history."[9]

One of the reasons for these complaints is the means by which many students have to learn social studies--the use of the textbook. One musical group declares irreverently social studies class is nothing more than "textbook madness."[10] Alice Cooper moans in "School's Out" that he was so bored and turned off in class because he had to study a "useless textbook."[11] Art Garfunkel in a revision of "(What a) Wonderful World" claims that he never gained any knowledge from his World History class because all he did was "Look at the book and turn the pages."[12]

Although the above songs are admittedly subjective in their opinions, it would appear that they might mirror some real concerns of today's students and teachers about social studies education. This aversion to and lack of interest in social studies should cause teachers to search for various and diversified resources in an effort to add vitality to their instruction in order to excite the imaginations of their students. Such a resource for teaching social studies is the use of popular music. B. Lee Cooper maintains:

> Social studies instruction should culminate in the ability of a student to anticipate, understand, direct, evaluate,and live with constant social change. Most historians agree that the only thing that is less constant than human beings' interpretation of the past is their ability to comprehend objectively changing events of their own lifetimes. The study of contemporary society demands that both teachers and students acknowledge their myopic tendencies and actively seek new methods and materials for investigating changes in present-day life. One potentially beneficial resource for analyzing the causes and effects of social change is the medium of popular music. If social studies teachers are seeking to enhance their students' abilities in utilizing skills such as problem identification, information gathering, hypothesis formulating, and decision making, then the use of popular lyrics should provide a rich resource for classroom experimentation.[13]

David Pichaske, English professor at Southwest State University, suggests that contemporary song lyrics are an "oral battlefield for conflicting social and political ideas."[14] It would be difficult to argue that the songs of the Vietnam era were not representative of the larger social conflict facing the nation.

Messages in the Music

It has been suggested that popular music functions as a form of propaganda -- the deliberate promotion, usually emotional, by an individual or group, using any form of communication, to create, change or control the attitudes and actions of others[15] -- and can be used to "communicate a specific 'sense of reality' or view of the world."[16] It "telegraphs important messages to young people and helps to define and codify the mores and standards of their own subculture," provides "the search for personal experience, primarily of the 'mind-expanding' sort," and "puts youth in touch with serious, intellectual critiques of American life."[17] Such songs help "to recruit supporters, to arouse sympathy, to counteract the feelings of despair, to encourage or inspire with hope for a new and happier future."[18]

Popular music used as a persuasive technique can be perceived as functioning to achieve the following effects:

A. Producing a strong sense of cohesion and group unity.

B. Arousing emotions so that listeners are more sensitive to a singer's message.

C. Elevating morale among listeners.

D. Attracting non-participators to a cause.

E. Encouraging people to get involved.

F. Getting listeners to identify with a call to action (a concrete solution is not stated, but rather a song calls the audience to be involved in some way).

G. Leading to counter-attitudinal advocacy on the part of listeners:

-- by actively participating and singing the song, the singer gets the audience to say what he/she wants them to say, whether or not the audience fully believes the message, thus leading to more attitude change.

-- by having a lasting effect, an attitude may be strengthened much later by a re-hearing or re-singing of the song.

POPULAR MUSIC AND VIETNAM

At no time have the impact and importance of popular music as a persuasive technique been greater than when America has been at war. Almost every American war has produced a number of songs that have for the most part identified national character and attitudes, maintained focus on a common cause, and promoted a sense of cohesion and group unity. The American Revolution had its "Battle of Trenton." The Civil War immortalized "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" for the North and "The Bonnie Blue Flag" for the South. The Spanish-American War came up with a jingoistic tune entitled "My Sweetheart Went Down With the Main," while George M. Cohan's "Over There" promoted World War One. World War Two saw many popular songs

such as "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition" stirring up patriotic fervor. The Korean conflict contributed a country-western ditty, "Advice to Joe," admonishing Russia's Premier Joseph Stalin.

The American experience in Vietnam, however, brought a division of contrary beliefs that were manifested in a sharp dichotomy of topical songs and lyrics that further polarized public opinion for nearly a decade. On the one hand was the music of the anti-war movement expressed in simple folk songs, e.g., "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?", rhythm-and-blues, e.g. "Bring the Boys Home", and electric rock, e.g., "Won't Get Fooled Again". These songs addressed a general disenchantment with American society, objected to war, in general, and the Vietnam War, in particular, promoted universal peace and brotherhood, decried violent domestic events such as Kent State, and advocated resisting the draft as a legitimate form of protest.

An example of this kind of music is illustrated by a San Francisco jug band that became known as Country Joe and the Fish.

> As the '60s drew to a close and the Vietnam War polarized the citizenry of America and Australia, the heavy mantel of leadership of the protest movement fell upon San Francisco revolutionaries Country Joe and the Fish. Joe McDonald was a musical agitator for many causes; he brutally mauled L. B. J. with "Superbird" and Nixon with "Tricky Dicky,' and echoed the angry mood of the anti-war movement with songs like "Untitled Protest," "Free Some Day" and "Maria." His finest moment came at the 1969 Woodstock Festival, when he led half a million voices in a determined

rendition of "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' To Die Rag," which he had first recorded way back in 1965."[19]

On the other hand, country-western music defended the actions and motives of the United States and condemned strongly the actions of the anti-war movement. Songs such as "Okie from Muskogee", "Hello Vietnam", and "Wish You Were Here, Buddy" supported the government's involvement in Vietnam, denounced Communism, lauded the valor and patriotism of those who chose to fight for their country, censured protestors, "hippies", and draft evaders, and called upon the youth of America to make the choice to either defend their country or "leave it ."

MUSICAL THEMES

The Vietnam War-related songs can be grouped into a number of categories that demonstrate the contrasting beliefs of those who opposed or supported the war effort. Each theme is described below by the general content of the songs. In addition, each theme is illustrated by those songs that characterize both the anti-war folk/rock song and the country-western pro-Vietnam song.

Attitude Towards War/Vietnam War

Songs that either censured the inhumanity of wars, in general, and the Vietnam War, in particular, or portrayed a patriotic support for the war in Indochina.

Folk/Rock	Country-Western

"An Untitled Protest" (From Haight Ashbury to Woodstock, Vanguard 28)
-Country Joe and the Fish

"Dear Uncle Sam" (Decca 31893)
-Loretta Lynn

"Eve of Destruction" (Dunhill 4009)
-Barry McGuire

"Hello Vietnam" (Decca 31821)
-Johnny Wright

"Kill For Peace" (ESP 1028)
-The Fugs

"It's Good News Week" (Parrott 9800)
-Hedgehoppers Anonymous

"Military Madness" (Atlantic 2827)
-Graham Nash

"7 O'Clock News/Silent Night" (Columbia 11669)
-Simon and Garfunkel

"Something in the Air" (Track 2656)
-Thunderclap Newman

"Stop the War Now" (Gordy 7104)
-Edwin Starr

"Universal Soldier" (Hickory 1338)

-Donovan

"War" (Gordy 7101)

-Edwin Starr

"Where Have All the Flowers Gone?"

(Capitol 4671)

-Kingston Trio

"White Boots March in a Yellow Land"

(Tape from California, A&M 4148)

-Phil Ochs

Battle/Soldiers

Songs that portray either a serious or humorous view of the varied experiences of the soldiers and the realities and consequences of battle conditions.

Folk/Rock

"I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-To-Die-Rag"

(Woodstock, Cortillion 3-500)

-Country Joe McDonald and the Fish

Country-Western

"Ballad of the Green Berets" (RCA 8739)

Barry Sadler

"Sky Pilot" (MGM K-13939)
-Eric Burdon and the Animals

"Talking Vietnam Pot Luck Blues"
(Morning Again, Elektra 74019)

"The Unknown Soldier" (Elektra 45628)
-The Doors

"Battle Hymn of Lt. Calley" (Plantation 73)
-C. Company, Featuring Terry Nelson

"Gallant Men" (Capitol 5805)
-Senator Evrett M. Dirksen

"It's For God and Country and You, Mom"
(Decca 31861)
-Ernest Tubb

"Ruby, Don't Take Your Love to Town"
(Reprise 08291)
-Kenny Rogers and the First Edition

"Singing in Vietnam Talking Blues"
(Columbia 45393)
-Johnny Cash

"Soldier's Last Letter" (Capitol 3024)
Mel Haggard

<u>The Draft</u>

Songs that either encourage young men to avoid or resist the draft or denounce evaders as unpatriotic and cowards.

Folk/Rock	Country-Western
"Alice's Restaurant" (Reprise 0877) -Arlo Guthrie	"An Open Letter to Teenage Son" (Liberty 55996) -Victor Lundberg
"Draft Dodger Rag" (Chords of Fame, A&M 4599) -Phil Ochs	"Conscientious Objector" -Keith Everett
"Draft Morning" (The Notorious Byrd Brothers, Columbia 9575) -The Byrds	"Mister Professor" (Decca 32756) -Le Roy Van Dyke
"Draft Resister" (Monster, Dunhill 56066) -Steppenwolf	"Okie From Muskogee" (Capitol 2626) -Merle Haggard
"Fortunate Son" (Fantasy 634) -Creedance Clearwater Revival	"The Ballad of Two Brothers" (Epic 10389) -Autry Inman
"Letter From a Teenage Son" (Philips 40503) -Brandon Wade	"The Minute Men (Are Turning in Their Graves)" (Columbia 43552) -Stonewall Jackson

"Lucky Man" (Cotillion 44106)
-Emerson, Lake and Palmer

"Wish You Were Here, Buddy" (Dot 16933)
-Pat Boone

"The Big Draft" (Capitol 4716)
-The Four Preps

"2-2=?" (Capitol 2143)
-Bob Seger System

Peace

Songs that either called for an unconditional peace and universal brotherhood or argued for a peace "with honor" after defeating the enemy.

Folk/Rock

"Aquarius/Let the Sunshine In" (Soul City 772)
-The 5th Dimension

"Give Peace a Chance" (Apple 1809)
-John Lennon and the Plastic Ono Band

Country-Western

"America, Communicate with Me" (Barnaby 2016)
-Ray Stevens

"Going Up the Country" (Liberty 56077)

-Canned Heat

"Happy Xmas (War is Over)" (Apple 1842)

-John Lennon and the Plastic Ono Band

"Peace Brother Peace" (MGM 14000)

-Bill Medley

"Peace Train" (A&M 1291)

-Cat Stevens

"Reach Out of the Darkness" (Verve 5069)

-Friend and Lover

"Ride Captain Ride" (Atco 6746)

-Blues Image

"San Francisco (Wear Some Flowers in Your Hair)" (Ode 103)

-Scott McKenzie

"Sweet Cherry Wine" (Roulette 7039)

-Tommy James and the Shondells

Attitudes Toward Society And Government

Songs that either exhibited a general dissatisfaction with both the American society and possible government deception and advocated needed change through public protest or defended fervently the traditional lifestyles of society and patriotic intent of the government and advocated a either "love it or leave it" attitude.

Folk/Rock

"American Woman" (RCA 0325)
-The Guess Who

"For What it's Worth" (Atco 6459)
-Buffalo Springfield

"Games People Play" (Capitol 2248)
-Joe South

"Get Together" (RCA 9752)
-The Youngbloods

"Here's to the State of Richard Nixon" (Chords of Fame, A&M 6511)
-Phil Ochs

Country-Western

"Day of Decision" (Warner Brothers 5820)
-Johnny Sea

"It's America (Love It or Leave It)" (Decca 32632)
-Ernest Tubb

"Okie from Muskogee" (Capitol 2626)
-Merle Haggard

"The Fightin' Side of Me" (Capitol 2719)
-Merle Haggard

"Vietnam Blues" (Mercury 72550)
-Dave Dudley

"Monster" (Dunhill 4221)
-Steppenwolf

"People Got to be Free" (Atlantic 2537)
-The Rascals

"Question" (Threshold 67004)
-Moody Blues

"Revolution" (Apple 2276)
-The Beatles

"Student Demonstration Time" (Surf's Up, Brothers 6453)
-The Beach Boys

"Superbird" (From Haight Asburt to Woodstock, Vanguard 28)
-Country Joe and the Fish

"The American Eagle Tragedy" (The Great American Eagle Tragedy, Elektra 74038)
-Earth Opera

"What We're Fighting For" (Mercury 72500)
-Dave Dudley

"Where Have All Our Heroes Gone?" (Decca 32744)
-Bill Anderson

"The Star Spangled Banner" (Reprise 1044)

-Jimi Hendrix Experience

"Volunteers" (RCA 47-0245)

-Jefferson Airplane

"Who'll Stop the Rain" (Fantasy 637)

-Creedance Clearwater Revival

"Won't Get Fooled Again" (Decca 32846)

-The Who

Domestic Events Related To The War

Songs that chronicle specific events that resulted in violent clashes between anti-war protesters/college students and the police/national guard.

Folk/Rock

Country-Western

Los Angeles Peace Riots, July 23, 1967

"For What It's Worth" (Atco 6459)
-Buffalo Springfield

1968 Democratic Presidential Convention
Chicago, Illinois, August 23-30, 1968

"Chicago" (Atlantic 2804)
-Graham Nash

"What Is Truth" (Columbia 45134)
-Johnny Cash

"How I Spent My Summer Vacation" (The Street Giveth..., Polydor)
-Cat Mother and the All Night Newsboys

Kent State Killings, May 4, 1970

"Jackson-Kent Blues" (Steve Miller Band
Number 5, Capitol KAO-436)
-Steve Miller Band

"Ohio" (Atlantic 2740)
-Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young

"Student Demonstration Time" (Surf's
Up, Brother 6453)
-The Beach Boys

Black Attitudes

Songs that demonstrate various frustrations and anxieties of blacks toward both the war and the home front.

Folk/Rock

"Aquarius (Let the Sunshine In)" (Soul City, 772)
-The 5th Dimension

"Bring the Boys Home" (Invictus 9092)
-Freda Payne

"Freedom" (Stormy Forest 666)
-Richie Havens

"Handsome Johnny" (Stormy Forest 666)
-Richie Havens

"Hey America" (King 63339)
-James Brown

"Stop the War Now" (Gordy 7104)
-Edwin Starr

"Vietnam" (A&M 1167)
-Jimmy Cliff

Country-Western

(none)

"War" (Gordy 7101)
-Edwin Starr

"We Got to Have Peace" (Roots, Curtom 8009)
-Curtis Mayfield

"What's Going On" (Tamia 54201)
-Marvin Gaye

The Role of Women

Songs that illustrate the active involvement and attitudes of women towards war and peace.

Folk/Rock	Country-Western
"Bring the Boys Home" (Invictus 9092) -Freda Payne	"Dear Uncle Sam" (Decca 31893) -Loretta Lynn
"Lay Down (Candles in the Rain)" (Buddah 167) -Melanie	"He Wore the Green Beret" (RCA) -Lesley Miller

"Moratorium" (She Used to Wanna be a
Ballerina, Vanguard 79311)
-Buffy Sainte Marie

"Peace Will Come (According to Plan)"
(Buddah 167)
Melanie

"Siagon Bride" (Joan, Vanguard)
-Joan Baez

"Universal Soldier" (The Strawberry
Statement, MGM 2338)
-Buffy Saint Marie

"What the World Needs Now is Love"
(Imperial 66110)
-Jackie DeShannon

"With God on Our Side" (In Concert --
Part 2, Vanguard 79113)
-Joan Baez

Song released after the war that illustrated the feelings of the men who fought in the Asian conflict.

Folk/Rock

"Born in the U.S.A." (Born in the U.S.A., Columbia 38653)
-Bruce Springsteen

"Hard to Be a Christian Soldier"
-Kris Kristoferson

"For America" (Asylum 69566)
-Jackson Browne

"In Saigon"
-Charley Daniels Band

"Goodnight Saigon" (The Nylon Curtain, Columbia 38200)
-Billy Joel

"19" (Chrysalis 42860)
-Paul Hardcastle

Classroom Activity

The following classroom activity can be used with the above musical themes. The teacher identifies to the class the focus of the lesson, presents the nature of the learning activity, and sets the specific tasks to be completed in small groups and in a

culminating panel discussion. The focus of the activity is to help students to recognize and understand the sharp division of beliefs toward the Vietnam War as manifested in popular music. The class is divided into six groups and each group is assigned one of the above themes with the appropriate songs.

The specific tasks assigned to each group are: (1) identify the issues, problems, circumstances, or events presented in each song; (2) isolate the major purpose stated implicitly or explicitly in each song; (3) distinguish the conflicting points-of-view and attitudes expressed in the songs as a whole; and (4) prepare a short presentation of the theme illustrated with music to be given before class. Each group with also select a panelist to appear in a panel discussion in front of the classroom.

The purpose of the panel is to present the findings of each group and explain how each of the six themes are associated and paralleled with one another. Each panelist in turn is given the opportunity to make statements concerning his/her group's findings with each other and respond to questions from the teacher and the audience.

With the completion of the panel discussion, each student is required to write a brief paper on the various attitudes toward the war as expressed in the songs, the small group meetings, and the panel discussion.

This activity using popular music to study the various opinions that Americans had about the Vietnam War stems from the desire to help students to maximize autonomy by learning how to discover and test their own conclusions separate of those already formatted by others, including teachers, historians, and the ever present textbook. Popular music can provide students with new insights and diverse points-of-view on a

variety of social and historical concerns about the Vietnam War. Through the use of popular music ("She's goin' to be a Rock-and-Roll singer."). Maybe, as social studies teachers, we can follow the instructional example of "Abigail Beecher" by creating and enlivening student curiosity in our social studies courses.

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NOTES

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2. Jerold M. Starr, "Teaching the Vietnam War." Social Education, vol. 52 (January 1988), p. 23-24.

3. Hugo Keesing, "Culture in the Grooves: American History at 78, 45 & 33 1/3 RPM." Paper presented at the Eighth National Convention of the Popular Culture Association, Cincinnati, Ohio, April 19-22, 1978.

4. "Back to School Again," Timmie Rogers, Cameo 116. "School is Out," Gary "U.S." Bonds, Legrand 1009. "School Days," Chuck Berry, Chess 1653.

5. "What Did You Learn in School Today," Chad Mitchell Trio in Reflecting, Mercury 60891. "Political Science," Randy Newman in Sail Away, Reprise 2064.

6. "Kodachrome," Paul Simon, Columbia 45858. "Teacher, Teacher," .38 Special in Teachers, Capitol 12371.

7. "Bicentennial," London Wainwright III in T-Shirt, Arista 4063. "What Did You Learn In School Today," Chad Mitchell Trio in Reflecting, Mercury 60891.

8. "Education," The Kinks in Schoolboys in Disgrace, RCA 5102. "The Logical Song," Supertramp in Breakfast in America, A&M 3708. "Society Child," Janis Ian, Verve 5027.

9. "(What A) Wonderful World," Sam Cooke, Keen 2112.

10. "School Daze," Wasp in W. A. S. P., Capitol 12343.

11. "School's Out," Alice Cooper, Warner Brothers 7596.

12. "(What A) Wonderful World," Art Garfunkel, Columbia 10676.

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18. As quoted in R. Serge Denisoff's Sing A Song of Social Significance, p. 3.

19. Glen A. Baker. "Rock's Angry Voice." Goldmine, No. 74 (July 1982), p. 10-11.

20. "Abigail Beecher," Freddy Cannon, Warner Brothers 5400.

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